



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Feature Article - Mystery pilchard death in Tasmanian waters

In March 1995 a series of Pilchard deaths in Tasmanian waters and elsewhere in Australia's southern oceans had no obvious cause.

Research into the cause of death at the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries marine laboratory based at Taroona and at other marine laboratories in southern Australia was undertaken almost immediately. Only adult Pilchard died, while juvenile Pilchard and other fish appeared to be unaffected.

Some scientists believe that nutrient rich cooler Antarctic waters with its high concentration of phytoplankton may have been responsible for the suffocation symptoms seen on many of the Pilchards. However, no algal presence appears to be associated with Pilchard kill in Tasmanian waters. Pollution has been discounted as a likely factor.

Tests have shown that there were no risks to humans from the Pilchard kill, and no risks to oysters, mussels and scallops.

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